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AUTHOR Wilson, Carrie; Garner, Barbara
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ABSTRACT

The Free Money Game is a group activity designed to: (1) familiarize refugee students with the purpose of public assistance, which is to maintain recipients at a survival level for a limited time; and (2) make students aware of the lack of options open to welfare recipients, the depersonalization associated with the bureaucracy, and the insecurity involved in welfare dependency. The specific objective is for players to collect as many options as possible to improve his or her life. Two teams, one employed and one unemployed, are given money. The employed team is given cash, and the unemployed team is given Free Money and Free Food tickets. Players must buy necessities before buying options. By the end of the third round, players must have spent all their money. The principal objective is to collect as many options as possible for improvement of their living standard. A follow-up discussion focuses on buying power and how it is affected by price changes and cuts in free money, and how it relates to quality of life and the players' own cultural values and reasons for leaving their home country. The game has proven to be effective in dramatizing why long-term welfare dependency is undesirable. Samples of the materials used in the game are included. (MSE)

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The "Free Money" Game

Carrie Wilson and Barbara Garner
Galang Refugee Processing Center

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Background and Objectives

According to the Regional Content Standards, refugees in Cultural Orientation (CO) classes should learn that the common American attitude towards welfare is that it is a temporary safety net, to be used only until recipients are self-sufficient. Refugees should understand what cash assistance, food stamps, and medicaid are and where the money for them comes from.

For some time, CO staff members at the Galang Refugee Processing Center had voiced dissatisfaction with the activities available to teach these points. These activities presented the facts, but failed to address the common refugee misconception that welfare is like a scholarship, providing opportunities for a new life. Attitudes were presented primarily from the American perspective, with little attention paid to the refugees' cultures.

In order to handle this topic more satisfactorily, the CO staff on Galang designed a lesson that deals with three questions: What is public assistance? Where does it come from? What is it really for? The result is the Free Money Game, an experiential approach to teaching about public assistance. Since the game mostly deals with attitudes, specific, detailed information about public assistance has not been included, but is handled in a subsequent lesson. The words "public assistance" and "welfare" are not used in the game at all. It takes about 90 minutes to introduce the activity, play the game, and hold a follow-up discussion.

Objectives

The objectives of the Free Money Game are two-fold: to familiarize the students with the purpose of public assistance, which is to maintain recipients at a survival level for a limited period of time; and to make the students aware of the lack of options open to welfare recipients, the depersonalization associated with the system's bureaucracy, and the insecurity involved in welfare dependency.

Materials Needed

The following materials must be prepared in advance.

Necessities and Options Chart: This is a large wall chart that summarizes all the items and services the players can purchase. (See Figure 1.)

Options Station Signs: These signs list the prices of various items and services the players can purchase. The signs are placed over the station where the goods or service can be purchased. (See Figure 2.)

Rule Change Signs: The prices of some services and goods change during the game, so signs stating the new prices are needed.

Refugees should understand what cash assistance, food stamps, and medicaid are and where the money comes from.

Rule Change Notes: Conditions affecting the players' income and options also change in the course of the game. Notification of these changes are placed in players' money packets in rounds two and three.

Option Receipt Sheets: All purchases and payments are recorded on official receipt sheets.

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Free Food Tickets: These are worth $100 and must be used to pay for food. (See Figure 3.)

Free Money Application Forms: Participants who receive free money will be required to fill out these application forms during the game. (See Figure 4.)

Money Packets: Money packets are given to the players at the beginning of each round. The amount of play money varies from round to round and by team.

Tally Sheet: The actual purchases made by the players are recorded on this wall chart. (See Figure 5.) The tally sheet is used in the follow-up discussion to focus on the choices made by the different teams and to illustrate the buying power each team achieved.

Procedures for Playing the Game

Classroom Arrangement: Arrange the classroom furniture so that there is a desk or a table for each of the following stations: Free Money Office; three or four Options Stations (depending upon the number of workers available); and a Necessities Office (the option "Move to a Better Apartment" is also placed at the Necessities Office). Each station should have play money available. Hang the Necessities/Options Chart and Tally Sheet on the wall.

Team Selection: Divide the players into two teams, Pink and Blue. Players are referred to as Pink or Blue rather than unemployed or employed throughout the game and during the discussion session following the game. We have found that strict adherence to the terms, Pink Team and Blue Team, maintains a game-like atmosphere and helps the discussion afterward. Distribute pink cards to the Pink Team and tell them to write their S-number on their cards. (The S-number is a nine-digit number, similar to a Social Security number, assigned to all Intensive Program students on Galang.) Blue Team players get blue cards on which they should write their names. The cards must be worn at all times during the game. Blue players are given chairs or benches to sit on; Pink players are required to sit on the floor.

In addition to the team players, the following "staff" are needed for the various structures and functions:

- Free Money Office Caseworker
- Personnel Officer
- Necessities Office staff
- Three or more options station staff
- Tally Sheet Worker

It is recommended that these roles be played by teachers or teacher aides.

Situation: Explain to the players that they are all refugees who have been in the U.S. for 12 months. They live in a poor neighborhood. They all have children living with them in the U.S. They also have relatives who are still in Galang hoping to be sponsored and have family members in Vietnam.

Object of the Game: Explain that the object of this game is to collect as many options as possible to improve the quality of the player's life. Note that there is no bank in this game, so saving money is not the object.

Rules

1. The game lasts for three rounds. During each round, players receive an envelope with money to pay for necessities and to buy options. The envelope also contains a receipt sheet on which their purchases will be recorded.
2. The Blue Team members receive their money in cash from the personnel officer. Pink Team members receive Free Money and Free Food tickets. Free Food tickets can only be used to pay the Necessities Office for food. To receive their tickets, Pink Team members must report to the Free Money Office at the beginning of each round and fill out an application form.
3. Everyone must pay for necessities before purchasing options. It is the responsibility of each player to make sure purchases are recorded on the receipt sheet.
4. Each round lasts 12 minutes. As soon as players have completed their purchases, they report to the tally sheet worker and hand in their receipt sheets. The worker tallies their purchases under the appropriate column – blue or pink. (Two options, Educational Opportunities For Children and Send Money to Vietnam, are not tallied by the number of times they are purchased, but by the total dollar amount).
5. Players don't have to spend all of their money during each round. If they wish, they can hold on to their money to buy more expensive options later. However, the object of the game is to collect options and to improve their standard of living, not to save money. By the end of Round 3, players must have spent all of their money.

Procedures to be followed by the Teacher

The following procedures should be followed during the game, but should not be explained to the players.

Figure 1: Necessities and Options Chart

Necessities		Options	
Rent	$300	• Move to a Better Apartment	$350/mo.
Food	$120	• Black & White TV	$100
Utilities	$ 60	• Color TV	$200
		• Stereo	$200
		• Car	
		Downpayment	$200
		plus	$50/mo.
		• Movies	$10
		• Long Distance Calls	$25
		• Vocational Training Class	$150
		• Educational Opportunities for Children	Open Amount
		• Sponsor Relatives in Galang	Free
		• Send Money to Relatives in Vietnam	Open Amount

Figure 2: Station Signs for Various Options and Necessities

Necessities Station:

Rent $300
Food $120
Utilities $ 60

– Option –

Rent a Better Apartment
$350/month

Option Station 1:

Black & White TV $100

Color TV $200

Stereo $200

Movies $ 10

Option Station 2:

Long Distance Calls $ 25

Vocational Training $150

Car:
Downpayment $100
plus $50/mo.

Option Station 2:

Educational Opportunities
For Children Open Amount

Sponsor Relatives in Galang
Free

Send Money to Relatives in
Vietnam Open Amount

Figure 3

Figure 4

Free Money Application

Name : _____

Address : _____

_____

City State Zip Code

S-Number : _____

Figure 5: Tally Sheet

ROUND	RENT A BETTER APT.		BLACK & WHITE TV		COLOR TV		CAR		STEREO		MOVIES		LONG DIST. CALLS		VOC. TRNG. CLASS		ED. OPPOR. C'DREN		SPONS. RELAT. GLG.		SEND $ TO VT.	
	BL.	PK.	BL.	PK.	BL.	PK.	BL.	PK.	BL.	PK.	BL.	PK.	BL.	PK.	BL.	PK.	BL.	PK.	BL.	PK.	BL.	PK.
1																						
2																						
3																						
TOTAL																						

After each round of play the decisions and purchases the players have made are recorded on the tally sheet. This wall chart is used in the discussion that follows the game.

1. Blue Team members will be handed their money packets and will always be referred to by their names. Pink players are not allowed to begin a round until all of the Blue players have received their money packets.
2. The Free Money caseworkers treat Pink players rudely. They call the Pink players by their S-numbers when they receive money packets and treat them impersonally throughout the game.
3. Some price changes occur during the game. These should be posted at the appropriate options stations at the beginning of the appropriate round.
4. The money packets for each round contain the following amounts of play money and notifications of rule changes:

	PINK	BLUE
Round 1	$450 Free Food Ticket ($100)	$600
Round 2	$450 Free Food Ticket ($100)	$675 Rule change notice: "You just received a raise. Your salary is now $550."
Round 3	$425 Free Food Ticket ($100) Rule change notice: "Due to policy changes, your Free Money has been cut to $425."	$700 Rule change notice: "Your boss gave you a $25 Christmas bonus."

5. Pink Team players can't sponsor relatives for resettlement. If they ask to, they should be told, "You receive Free Money. Only Blue team players can sponsor relatives."
6. At the end of Round 3, total all of the options purchased by each group. List the totals in the columns according to Pink or Blue Team. Total the final dollar amounts for the options Educational Opportunities for Children and Send Money to Vietnam.

Follow-up Discussion

After the three rounds are completed, the teacher leads a follow-up discussion, the tally sheet is reviewed with the class, and the amount of buying power of each group is pointed out. The following can be used to guide discussion.

A. Start by focusing on buying power. Questions the teacher can ask include:
- What options did each group purchase?
- What options did each group ignore?
- Which group was able to deposit the most money for education and money to send to Vietnam?
- Why didn't the Pink Team members sponsor relatives in Galang?
- Overall, who seems to have the most buying power?

B. Compare how much money each group received during the three rounds. Although both groups started off with about the same amount of money, what happened to change the buying power?

C. Refer to the price changes and cuts in Free Money when discussing the insecurity involved in the game.

D. Discuss the options, eliciting the categories: Luxuries, Future-oriented, and Ties with Family. Ask the students to list the options related to each category.
- Luxuries: TV, stereo, car, movies
- Future-oriented: Vocational training, educational opportunities, moving to a better apartment
- Ties with Family: Long-distance calls, sending money to Vietnam, sponsoring relatives

E. Ask the students how these options correspond with their values and reasons for leaving Vietnam. Discuss how these options determine more than their financial status, they determine a quality of life.

F. Discuss quality of life as a way people feel about themselves and the way others view them. Ask the students to think about the different ways the Pink and Blue Team members were treated. How did the different rules make them feel?

Concluding the Game

By this point, the students will realize that Free Money is another word for public assistance. The teacher should reiterate that this is a game that looks at the time six months to one year after refugees have arrived in the U.S. It has been designed to emphasize certain points – the feelings of insecurity and the lack of buying power that result from continuing use of public assistance. Point out that Pink Team players had enough money to pay for necessities, but only Blue Team players had money to amass options. The students should come to

realize that public assistance is not a scholarship to provide opportunities for the future and to improve the quality of one's life; it is a means to maintain someone at a basic level. Point out that it is understood that when refugees first arrive in the U.S., they often need assistance and that there are resources that allow people "to leave the Pink Team and join the Blue." In real life, there are agencies and programs to help individuals find employment and become financially independent. The teacher may conclude the classroom session by announcing that the next lesson will provide more specific information about what public assistance is and how it works.

Conclusion

The Free Money Game was designed specifically for Vietnamese refugees at the Galang Refugee Processing Center, but it can be adapted for use elsewhere. Obviously, the logistical demands of the game are substantial, and advance preparation of materials and adequate staff to work at the different stations and offices are required. Still, it is very effective in dramatizing why long-term welfare dependency is undesirable. Before the Free Money Game was introduced, attitudes were discussed and debated as theoretical issues, but now they are considered in the light of direct personal experience.

Carrie Wilson is the Cultural Orientation program officer at the Philippine Refugee Processing Center. Prior to this, she coordinated the Orderly Departure orientation project in Bangkok and served as the Cultural Orientation Coordinator at Galang. Wilson co-authored A Guide to Teaching Refugee Women and has five years of experience in U.S. refugee resettlement programs.

Barbara Garner is a materials writer for the PASS American Studies Curriculum at Phanat Nikhom Refugee Camp. From 1983-1985, she served as a Cultural Orientation (CO) supervisor at the Galang Refugee Processing Center. Other CO experience includes teaching life skills in a refugee program in New York City and providing CO training to university professors in Korea who were preparing to study in the U.S.